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Equality of Opportunity for All Americans

— *Executive Summary* —

The Republican party is the party of opportunity. It was founded on the core American insight that all men are created equal and deserve to be judged – as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said – not “by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Republicans are proud of their agenda, believing that it compassionately addresses the concerns of Americans of every color and creed. Republicans hold fast to their conviction that government should ensure equality of opportunity – not equality of result. We know that the free market creating more and better-paying jobs uplifts workers more than paternalistic government programs. We also know that a good job starts with a good education. We applaud our President for promoting educational reform, for example, and we vow not to abandon minority children to a school system that has failed them.

The Republican Party endorses giving parents the opportunity to choose where to send their children to school:

- Sixty percent of African Americans gave their public schools a “C” grade. (Public Opinion Strategies, 3/01)
- Seventy-two percent of African Americans would support an initiative to allow the tax dollars allotted for their children’s education to be used for private or public school tuition. Most white respondents (62 percent) would support it, too. (Zogby, 7/02)
- Seventy-five percent of African Americans support allowing parents to send their children to “a school of their choice.” (Zogby, 7/02)

The No Child Left Behind Act gives parents better choices by allowing students in poorly rated public schools to transfer to a different public school.

On welfare, Republicans believe the measure of compassion should not be how many needy people receive government aid, but how many people no longer need government assistance:

- Welfare caseloads have fallen from 14 million recipients in 1994 to just 5 million in 2002. The number of families on welfare has decreased from 4.3 million in 1996 to 2.2 million in 2000. (Heritage, 9/02)
- African American child poverty in 2001 is the lowest rate on record. Since welfare reform was enacted in 1996, over 1 million African American children have risen out of poverty, constituting an 11-percent swing. Hispanic child poverty has decreased by nearly one-third from 1995 to 2001. (Census Bureau, 9/02)

The Republican agenda is compassionate in its support of welfare policies that help Americans use government programs as a stepping stone on the way to a more independent life.

And Republicans support Social Security policies that give Americans the opportunity to participate in a reformed retirement program that would assure them a fair return:

- The current Social Security system discriminates against African Americans because of their average lower life expectancy and earlier entry into the job market. Payments into and disbursements from Social Security result in an estimated \$10,000 per-person net lifetime transfer of wealth from blacks to whites.¹

Republican proposals to allow workers to invest a portion of their payroll taxes in private accounts would help correct this problem.

Republicans also know that for many Americans who live in economically depressed communities, providing access to capital will revitalize the job market, empower more workers, and ultimately lead to increased revenues:

- Through Republican-led initiatives like the Talent-Watts Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000, steps are being taken to create, in effect, an enterprise zone for the 21st century. But Republicans had to wait five years for that legislation to pass. A Democratic administration only agreed to sign it after altering the Republican concept of true tax relief incentives by adding tax credits and hand-outs that reduced the law's ability to create real long-term growth.

¹Constantijn W.A. Panis and Lee Lillard, "Socioeconomic Differentials in the Return to Social Security," RAND Corporation Working Paper no. 96-05, 1996, p. 14-20.

Republicans have a better plan of targeted tax incentives to rejuvenate communities in vital need of a hand up, not a hand-out. In the 21st century the Republican Party will continue to build and execute that plan using ideas like the Talent-Watts initiative.

Republicans also support policies that would repeal the death tax, which especially affects small business owners and farmers:

- Harry C. Alford, president and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, had this to say: “The total net worth of African Americans is only 1.2 percent of the total net worth of the nation. Getting rid of the ‘Death Tax’ will start to create a needed legacy and begin a cycle of wealth building for blacks in this country. Eliminating the ‘Death Tax’ will be a great start.”²
- Those with lower incomes are more likely to view the death tax as unfair. Fully 65 percent of those with incomes below \$30,000 believe the death tax is unfair. By comparison, only 59 percent of individuals with incomes above \$60,000 label the death tax unfair. (Luntz Research Companies, January 27, 2003)

The death tax limits the opportunities African Americans have to create a needed legacy of wealth.

Republicans continue to work hard to change the assumption that African Americans cannot compete with others in school or at work:

- A spring 2001 *Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Poll of racial attitudes asked the question: “In order to give minorities more opportunity, do you believe that race or ethnicity should be a factor when deciding who is hired, promoted, or admitted to college, or that hiring, promotions, and college admissions should be based strictly on merit and qualifications other than race or ethnicity?” *Ninety-two percent of all respondents – and 86 percent of African American respondents – said these decisions should only be based on merit and qualifications, and that race should not be a factor.*
- A January 2000 Zogby International poll of university students found that 77 percent of all respondents – and 52 percent of African American university students, as well as 71 percent of Hispanic students – reject the view that “schools should give minority students preference in the admissions process.”
- In a poll conducted by Paul Sniderman and Thomas Piazza for their recent book, *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* (2002), 90 percent of African American respondents oppose colleges admitting an African American applicant over a white applicant with SAT scores 25 points higher.

²“Impact of the Death Tax on African American Owned Businesses,” Facts and Stats, U.S. House of Representatives Republican Conference, July 21, 1999.

- Several polls conducted this year by *Newsweek*, *Time*, *EPIC/MRA*, and *The Los Angeles Times* show Americans agree by a majority of *more than two-to-one* with President Bush's decision to oppose an admissions policy at the University of Michigan which awards extra points to applicants based on race, believing students should be evaluated on their academic performance and accomplishments.

Regardless of their political affiliation, African Americans consistently oppose the use of racial preferences for hiring, public contracting, or admissions to colleges and universities. Republicans support equal opportunity for everyone, not a guaranteed outcome for anyone. Regardless of their political affiliation, African Americans have agreed with this principle.

It is not compassionate to support policies that keep people on welfare, that keep students in failing schools, or that require people to pay income into a retirement program that yields a poor return. Nor is it compassionate to stymie community renewal prospects by denying Americans true access to capital, or to jeopardize a small business or farm because of a death. And it is certainly not compassionate to assume that an African American cannot compete with others in school or at work. Republicans will continue to support policies based on the constitutional principle of the equality of all Americans. Such policies will help all Americans; but they will especially help those who have not yet shared equally in the American dream.